

National Training Center

OPFOR Insight

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For any unit conducting a rotation at the National Training Center (NTC), it is important to understand how the opposing force (OPFOR) plans and executes a mission on that battlefield. It is also important to understand that the OPFOR regiment is good, but it is not invincible.

When the OPFOR regiment attacks, its normal strength is about 50 tanks, 116 BMPs, 9 AT-5s, and 300 infantrymen. Often the total force ratio is 1:1 at best. The OPFOR may be assigned a penetration mission or a force destruction mission. Either way, it will try to make contact in an area where it can isolate enemy forces and achieve a local superiority of 3:1.

Units training at the NTC must also understand that the OPFOR regiment will stop for nothing. If you have not planned and rehearsed the repositioning of your forces, the regiment will find you and pile on. The OPFOR rehearses and drills its motorized rifle platoon and company battle drills in great detail before every rotation and every mission. Thus, it can react and redirect quickly, penetrate your unit and destroy your force. You must learn to identify, observe, and act upon decision points if you ever hope to get inside the OPFOR regiment's decision cycle.

This article is based on an actual mission planned and executed by the OPFOR regiment, and it offers several generic lessons that can be applied to all units. These are lessons the OPFOR has learned and used during every mission it has planned and executed.

The Mission

The 32d Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (MRR)(-) attacks from the march to penetrate defending enemy forces and secure the MRR objective in the vicinity of grid NK6011.

The 3d Motorized Rifle Battalion (MRB), 32d Guards MRR, attacks from the march as an enveloping detachment along the division's southern avenue of approach to destroy enemy second echelon battalion, brigade reserve, artillery, command and control assets, and logistics bases.

Courses of Action

COA 1 (Base Plan). *Task Force Destroyer leaves line of departure (LD) 081900XXX95 to seize Hill 899, Brigade Hill, and Chod Hill.*

The 3d MRB attacks through the Valley of Death, north over the Siberian Ridge, and seizes Hill 781 East and Hill 760 to facilitate the penetration of the advance Guard MRB and MRR main body in the vicinity of the Peanut/Chod gap by destroying or fixing enemy forces in the vicinity of Hill 760. Task Force Angel lands in the vicinity of John Wayne Foothills, seizes Hill 824, and orients fires on Hill 760.

The advance guard MRB attacks through Debnam Pass to the Peanut/Chod gap to destroy enemy forces, clear enemy obstacles, and seize Hill 780. Advance guard MRB continues attacking east until combat ineffective.

Main body MRBs attack abreast through Peanut/Chod gap and Peanut Hill 876 gap, echeloned right. Left

side MRB, supporting effort (SE) screens right side MRB's, main effort (ME), northern flank by seizing Hills 780 and 760. Right side MRB penetrates enemy forces along southern wall of central corridor and seizes MRR objective. ATB screens MRR northern flank.

Reserve follows and assumes main effort or exploits main effort success.

The following are the conditions that must be present to execute COA 1:

- ♦ *Enveloping detachment successful at Hill 760.*

- ♦ *John Wayne Pass held or blocked by enemy forces.*

- ♦ *More than one company team that can influence the Alpha and Bravo Passes in the northern corridor.*

COA 2: *Task Force Destroyer crosses LD 081900XXX95 to seize Hill 899, Brigade Hill, and Chod Hill.*

The 3d MRB attacks through the Valley of Death, north over the Siberian Ridge, and seizes Hill 781 East and Hill 760 to facilitate the penetration of the advance guard MRB and MRR main body vicinity the Peanut/Chod gap by destroying or fixing enemy forces vicinity Hill 760. Task Force Angel lands vicinity John Wayne Foothills, seizes Hill 824, and orients fires on Hill 760.

The advance guard MRB attacks through Debnam Pass to the Peanut/Chod gap to destroy enemy forces, clear enemy obstacles, and seize Hill 780. Advance guard MRB continues attacking east until combat ineffective.

TRAINING NOTES

Main body, left side (SE), MRB attacks to reinforce advance guard at Peanut/Chod gap. On order disengages and follows main effort MRB through Hidden Valley and John Wayne Pass, and over Siberian Ridge. Main body, right side (ME), MRB attacks through Hidden Valley, John Wayne Pass, and over Siberian Ridge to seize MRR objective.

ATB screens MRR northern flank.

Reserve follows and assumes main effort or exploits main effort success.

The following are the conditions for executing COA 2:

- ♦ Enveloping detachment successful at Hill 760.

- ♦ John Wayne Pass clear of enemy forces and obstacles.

- ♦ Hidden Valley defended by less than one mechanized platoon.

- ♦ Enemy forces strong around Hill 876, Peanut, Chod, and Hill 780.

COA 3: Task Force Destroyer LDs 081900XXX95 to seize Hill 899, Brigade Hill, and Chod Hill.

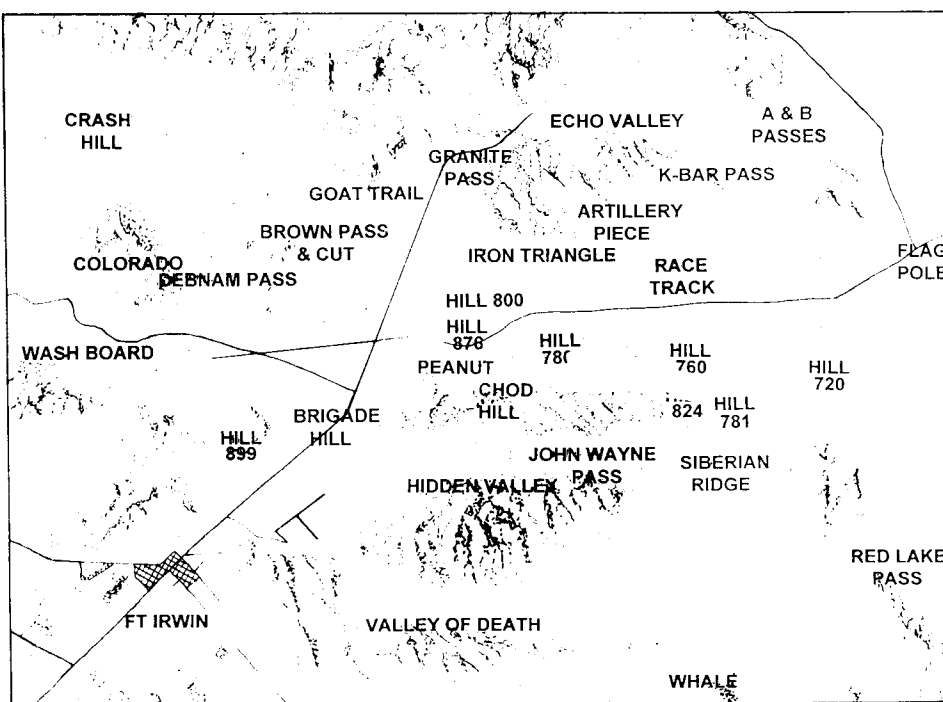
The 3d MRB attacks through the Valley of Death, north over the Siberian Ridge, and seizes Hill 781 East and Hill 760 to facilitate the penetration of the advance guard MRB and MRR main body vicinity the Iron Triangle by destroying or fixing enemy forces vicinity Hill 760. Task Force Angel lands vicinity John Wayne Foothills, seizes Hill 824, and orients fires on Hill 760.

The advance guard MRB attacks through Brown Pass to the Iron Triangle to destroy or fix enemy forces. Advance guard MRB continues attack through the Artillery Piece and Racetrack and continues east until combat ineffective.

Main body MRBs attack abreast through the Brown Cut and Brown Pass, echeloned left. Right side MRB (SE) screens left side MRBs (ME) southern flank by seizing the Iron Triangle, Racetrack, and continues setting rolling firing lines to the east. Right side MRB (ME) penetrates high along the north wall of the central corridor and seizes the MRR objective.

ATB screens MRR southern flank.

Reserve follows and assumes main effort or exploits main effort success.



Conditions to execute COA 3:

- ♦ No more than one company team at Iron Triangle.

- ♦ Brigade reserve south of Hill 720 or north of Range 23 flagpole.

- ♦ Two or more company teams defending in the northern corridor's Echo Valley.

- ♦ Enemy forces strong around Hill 876, Peanut, Chod, and Hill 780.

- ♦ Enveloping detachment little or no success.

COA 4: Task Force Destroyer to seize Hill 899, Brigade Hill, and Chod Hill.

The 3d MRB attacks through the Valley of Death, north over the Siberian Ridge, and seizes Hill 781 East and Hill 760 to facilitate the penetration of the advance guard MRB vicinity the Iron Triangle by destroying or fixing enemy forces vicinity Hill 760. Fixes or destroys enemy reserves in central corridor to prevent enemy repositioning into the northern corridor.

Task Force Angel lands vicinity

Alpha Pass and clears pass of enemy obstacles and forces.

The advance guard MRB attacks through Brown Pass to the Iron Triangle to destroy or fix enemy forces. Advance guard MRB establishes firing lines and secures main body's southern flank as it attacks through Granite Pass and penetrates through Alpha Pass.

Main body MRBs attack abreast through the Brown Cut and the Goat Trail, echeloned right. Neither MRB is designated the main effort yet. Whichever MRB enters the northern corridor through Granite Pass first becomes the supporting effort. Once in the corridor the lead MRB seizes firing lines to support-by-fire the assault through Alpha Pass by the trail MRB. If the pass is lightly defended or undefended, the lead MRB will penetrate and secure the eastern side to pass the trail MRB through to the MRR objective.

ATB screens MRR southern flank.

One ATC remains with advance guard,

TASK ORGANIZATION

1st MRB (Advance Guard)	2d MRB (Main Body)	3d MRB (Enveloping Det.)	4TH MRB (Main Body)	RESERVE	ATB (Antitank)	TF Angel (Air Assault)	TF Destroyer (Dismounted)
10 T-72 29 BMP-1 1 MSD 4 TDA-M	10 T-72 29 BMP-1 100 Inf 1 MSD	10 T-72 29 BMP-1 6 Mortars	10 T-80 28 BMP-2	10 T-72	12 AT-5 6 MT-12 2 MOD	100 INF 3 AT-5	100 Inf 3 AT-5 1 Mortar

two ATCs move with main body to facilitate penetration in Alpha Pass.

Conditions:

- No more than two company teams in northern corridor; includes Granite Pass.

- No more than one company team that can influence Alpha Pass.

Execution

The enveloping detachment was extremely successful in destroying and fixing enemy forces around Hill 760. Scouts reported at first light that no enemy forces were defending Alpha or Bravo Pass but that one mechanized company team was defending Granite Passes East and West. This company team was primarily above ground due to the destruction of its bulldozer by an OPFOR scout BMP-1 on the night of 08XXX95. Its infantrymen were dismounted and defending in both Granite East and Granite West Passes. One enemy company team was reported vicinity the Iron Triangle. John Wayne Pass was reported blocked and defended by enemy forces. The remainder of the enemy brigade was defending primarily from Hill 876 to Hill 780 to Hill 760 and along the southern wall of the central corridor.

The OPFOR regimental commander ordered that COA 4, the attack through Granite Pass and penetration through Alpha Pass, be executed at 090700XXX95 as the advance guard MRB crossed the LD. Minor modifications were made during the attack based on enemy disposition and action. The advance guard MRB was ordered to clear Granite Passes East and West with one motorized rifle company (MRC). The ATB would assist in this task with its long-range fires. Task Force Angel was ordered to land north of Granite Pass West and clear through to the south. The advance guard's MRC and Task Force Angel knew they would be converging with each other. Purple smoke had been designated during the MRR operations order to mark friendly positions. No additional coordinated fire lines were developed because both forces were executing on the move.

Close air strikes were directed at the

enemy around the Peanut/Chod gap and Hills 876 and 780 during the first sortie to aid in the deception that the regiment would attack there. All subsequent sorties were directed at the company team around the Iron Triangle. Artillery smoke was fired continuously at the Iron Triangle to screen the main body's turn to the north. Artillery scattered mines were fired vicinity the Range 23 flagpole to slow enemy repositioning into the northern corridor. The attacking force employed electronic warfare jamming against the enemy's artillery nets and on the company team defending the Granite Passes once the advance guard cleared Brown Pass.

Task Force Angel landed north of Granite Pass West and began clearing to the south. The second lift of Task

You must be able to modify your course of action on the basis of enemy action and you must be able to do so quickly if you are to stay inside the enemy's decision cycle.

Force Angel was shot down by enemy M-2s in the Granite Pass. Those soldiers already on the ground continued to attack and clear south. The Advance Guard's MRC clearing the passes to the north sustained losses but still gained a foothold in Granite Pass East. Both Task Force Angel and the MRC reported many dismounted enemy infantry in the rocks along Granite Passes East and West.

The advance guard main body was successful in seizing firing lines that allowed it to secure the southern flank of the MRR's main body. It also employed its organic mortars to add to the artillery-delivered smoke line.

The combat reconnaissance patrols (CRPs) of the MRR main body MRBs cleared Brown Cut, Brown Pass, and the Goat Trail to ensure that no enemy artillery delivered mines had been fired along the advance guard's route of march. All routes were clear. The CRP of the right MRB was directed to clear and mark Granite Pass East for

passage of that MRB. The CRP of the left MRB was directed by its MRB commander to clear and mark Granite Pass West. Additionally, this CRP was directed by its MRB commander to clear and mark Gold Pass because of the reports of dismounted infantry in Granite Pass West. These CRPs reported that Granite Passes East and West were still defended by enemy forces, now primarily dismounted infantry. Gold Pass was reported cleared and undefended. Based on these reports, and the attack of Task Force Angel in Granite Pass West, the right MRB commander ordered an assault through Granite Pass East. The left MRB commander ordered a march through the undefended Gold Pass. One CRP BMP remained behind to guide the left MRB into Gold Pass.

The left MRB entered the northern corridor first while the right MRB assaulted through Granite Pass East. The left MRB remained in march formation in order to reach and secure Alpha Pass as quickly as possible. This MRB's CRP reported that Alpha Pass was undefended and continued to push east looking for repositioning enemy forces. As the lead MRC of the left MRB cleared Alpha Pass, the right MRB entered the northern corridor after completing the destruction of the defending enemy company team in Granite Pass East. The left MRB cleared Alpha Pass and pushed to the southeast, setting rolling firing lines to destroy any enemy forces that were repositioning. The right MRB and the reserve cleared Alpha Pass and continued to the east to seize the MRR objective.

The regimental commander now ordered the enveloping detachment to begin an attack to the northeast to consolidate the regiment on the objective. The right MRB secured the northern side, the left MRB secured the west side, the enveloping detachment secured the south side, and the reserve secured the east side of the regiment's objective.

There are several lessons to be learned from this mission:

- A plan must include more than

one course of action. Rarely will any one plan anticipate all of the enemy's actions. The OPFOR regiment did not think it would be executing COA 4 because of the easily defensible terrain in the northern corridor. The "Blue Force" (BLUFOR) brigade also must have believed that the OPFOR would not be executing COA 4 since they did little to prevent it.

- ♦ You must defend your entire sector. At least you must have a plan to move to another point in your sector if you choose to accept risk there. A capable enemy will find where you have accepted risk and strive to exploit your weakness. The OPFOR expects its scouts to find just these areas. If you saw the Needs Practice and Untrained ratings on OPFOR scout METL assessments, you would think someone was joking. Units perform to the level and standard they are trained and expected to perform.

- ♦ A plan must be simple. It must be understood and rehearsed by those who will execute it. This includes all of your courses of action. If it is not simple, understood, and rehearsed, it is inflexible and will not survive the first contact with the enemy. You must be able to modify your course of action on the basis of enemy action and you must be able to do so quickly if you are to stay inside the enemy's decision cycle. To do this you must build your plan based on crew, squad, platoon, and company battle drill proficiency. If these units cannot execute drills quickly, your battalions and brigades will continue to be destroyed by the OPFOR.

- ♦ You can develop courses of action that are based solely upon your anticipated mission, terrain analysis, enemy doctrine, and past actions. This is exactly how every OPFOR course of action is first developed. Then you develop a reconnaissance and surveillance plan that will confirm or deny your templated courses of action. You must therefore know your enemy and the way he fights. You must seek to destroy his scouts while at the same time positioning your own.

- ♦ Always remember that reconnaissance is not a unit. It is a mission. Sting-

er teams, TOWs, combat observation lasing teams, and other platoons, as well as scouts, can all be tasked to perform reconnaissance as well as counterreconnaissance missions. Pilots can also be an immediate source of intelligence if you ask.

- ♦ Once you begin refining your template, adjust your courses of action accordingly or even discard some. The OPFOR generally develops four courses of action for both offensive and defensive missions but rarely hits LD time with more than two that are still options.

- ♦ You must give your subordinates mission-oriented orders all the way down to individual track commanders, squad leaders, and team leaders—and trust them to execute those orders. This gets back to your soldiers and crews being proficient in executing their battle drills. But if they don't know the plan, haven't rehearsed the plan, or haven't even been briefed on the concept, what can you trust them to execute? The OPFOR empowers its track commanders to take action within the framework of each course of action. Leaders can die all the way down to individual vehicles and someone will

Leaders can die all the way down to individual vehicles and someone will still know and execute the plan.

still know and execute the plan. If all else fails, all OPFOR soldiers understand their commander's intent, "Kill the BLUFOR!"

- ♦ The OPFOR requires all of its track commanders to attend MRB orders and rehearsals. These rehearsals occur after MRB commanders rehearse the regiment's courses of action on a terrain model. While MRB commanders are rehearsing at regiment, MRCs are issuing orders and rehearsing generic battle drills such as bypassing or breaching minefields and mines; defile drills; gun tube orientation; 360-degree security; setting firing lines; and action left, right, and rear. At least one

OPFOR MRB lives by boresight, battle drills, and detailed rehearsals. These orders and rehearsals occur for every battle, every rotation. Every enemy is a little different, and so is every OPFOR mission plan. If these rehearsals and battle drills are that important to a regiment that fights every month, they must be important for everyone else as well.

- ♦ Although secure radio nets may not be monitored, they can be detected and therefore jammed. Certain nets are always active at certain times—scout nets at night, command nets around EENT (end evening nautical twilight) and at BMNT (beginning morning nautical twilight). Fire support nets are easy to identify once enemy calls for fire are answered with rounds down range. Other critical nets, such as a company team defending Granite Pass, can be prompted to become active by creating activity that will cause them to transmit. To avoid these problems, alternate nets must be used before the anticipated battle time. At LD time or the defend no-later-than time, switch command and fire support nets, at a minimum, to "battle command" nets. The OPFOR has no secure nets and is very well trained at using the battle command net technique as well as fighting through jamming and jumping frequencies.

- ♦ A 20-page OPORD is ridiculous. So is a 10-page one. Subordinate commanders cannot remember or comprehend so many ideas and tactics all at once. The standard four-COA, OPFOR regimental OPORD consists of a one-page (front and back) handwritten execution matrix. The same is true for MRB and MRC OPORDs. Granted, some units will need to include another page for logistics requirements that do not always burden the OPFOR. But the OPFOR units too must recover and repair its vehicles at the end of every fight, so they do include the essential paragraph four information in their one-page OPORDs.

- ♦ OPORD graphics have no overlays on them. The maneuver, fire support, engineer, and air defense graphics are all included on a one-page.

black-and-white photo-copied map. This makes it much easier to remember such things as minefields and indirect fire targets, and easier to see how they all relate to the maneuver plan. These graphics are given to every track commander. A BLUFOR maneuver commander should have only the maneuver and engineer graphics on his map, at the most. His forward observer or fire support team is there to call the fires he wants (or he can just use grids), his XO or first sergeant is there to run the logistical support, and his air defense artillery soldiers can conduct the air defense. Of course, he must also have access to these other graphics in case he needs to refer to them. Again, the point here is that subordinates can do their jobs if they know and understand the plan and can execute their battle drills. These abilities—once developed, trained, and expected in a subordinate—free just

enough of the commander's time to let him command the fighting of his unit instead of just his vehicle.

Finally, not all the fighting is done at the pointy end of the sword. Many logistics elements such as maintenance facilities and fuel, water, and ammunition convoys are often left alone and uninformed as to what is happening forward on the NTC battlefield they are supporting. Consequently, they often fall prey to OPFOR soldiers raiding in brigade rear areas and along the main supply route. These logistics people are soldiers who perform a vital function keeping the pointy end sharp. If you ignore them for too many nights in a row, you'll find they're all dead along your fuel-strewn, watered-down main supply route, and you have no ammunition or food in your tactical assembly areas.

The National Training Center

OPFOR is a tenacious, innovative force, and it likewise takes tenacity and innovation to defeat it. The principles that determine success at the NTC are not new ones, and this article illustrates their proper application. The enemy that the U.S. forces face at Fort Irwin employs the tactics and techniques any present-day adversary may use against us, and if we learn—and learn well—from the NTC experience, victory will be ours.

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